

punched the wall to vent his frustrations, and then he punched the mattress an inch from the boy's face, sending him high into the air in a triple front somersault.

Ellis cried, "Oh my God," and shuffled back to catch his son, who was tumbling across the room like a poorly thrown forward pass. He scooped him up just before he hit the rug, pulling him up and clutching him to his chest. The boy was saucer-eyed and silent, until he figured out that he wasn't dead. Then he resumed his vocalizations, fueled now by fear instead of anger.

Ellis fixed another bottle and wrestled with his son in his recliner, his nerves as shot as they could be. The football game was long gone. It had been replaced by a mini-series about World War Two. Everybody was screwing everybody else. And the baby's screams had turned into a hoarse and desperate shout.

Finally, as Carson started in on his monologue, Baby Roy, too tired and hungry to be defiant anymore, took the nipple that his father had been stabbing at his face and finished the milk in one huge slurp. Then he let out a loud, somnolent burp, and fell asleep in his father's arms.

When Ruth and Juanita encountered blood on the porch, they feared the worst. Ruth said, "Oh my God," and put her hand over her mouth. Her eyes watered as her imagination worked. Juanita grabbed her arm and led her inside the house.

The only light was the erie glow from the T.V.'s test pattern. Ruth whimpered like a puppy. Juanita hit the light, squinted around the room, and said, "Oh look, how cute."

Ellis was kicked back in his recliner, snoring and drooling out of the side of his mouth. Baby Roy, with just a touch of white spit-up on his cheek, was sleeping peacefully on his father's bare chest, clasping a handful of the salt-and-pepper chest fur tightly in his tiny fist.

LUAU

When Clete got home from work, Juanita was playing ukulele music on the stereo while she danced the hula in a shedding grass skirt. "What's up?" Clete asked.

"Luau," said Juanita, floating her fleshy arms one way and then the other. She hula-ed out to the kitchen and pulled

a butcher knife out of the drawer. "The pig's in the back yard," she said. "That's your job."

Clete took the knife from her and stepped out the sliding glass door: there was a fresh hole in the lawn the size of a burial plot, its bottom covered with steaming hot beach cobbles. The pig, a big mean looking fellow with little pink eyes, was huddled in the corner of the yard with his butt backed up against the fence. He snorted and pawed the ground when he saw Clete.

Clete stepped back inside and said, "Juanita, why don't we just get a nice canned ham; you know, stick it with some cloves, smear it with brown sugar and pineapple juice...."

Juanita halted her hula for a moment to glare at him. Clete said, "O.K. I'll go get Ellis to help me."

Juanita said, "Good idea," and resumed her dance.

Ellis, their next door neighbor, said, "You gotta hit him in the head with a hammer first, then you slit his throat." He went to his garage for his ball-peen, and they were off to kill a pig.

Clete steered the unsteady Ellis through the house, out to the back yard: the poor fellow had gotten a good look at Juanita's big white thighs as she hula-ed and her grass skirt lost its foliage. He was dazed. The pig took advantage of the situation by charging, knocking him ass over tea kettle before he could even get his hammer up. Then the beast spun around and went for his throat. Clete jumped on the pig's back, hooking his elbow under its chin to pull its head back. The pig bucked and spun, but Clete held on tight and laid his throat open with the knife.

The luau was on.

THE WEANING OF BABY ROY

Ellis picked up some liquid fertilizer at the hardware store and sprayed it on the front lawn. Almost overnight the bare brown grass blossomed into a lush, roof-high jungle that obscured the house from the street.

Ruth and Ellis' young son, Roy, who was just learning to crawl, pushed through the unlatched screen door and vanished in tangled foliage.

Ruth was panic stricken, making several safaris in search of the boy, hacking through the overgrowth with a large